HANK WESSELMAN, PhD

THE BOWL OF LIGHT

Ancestral Wisdom from a Hawaiian Shaman

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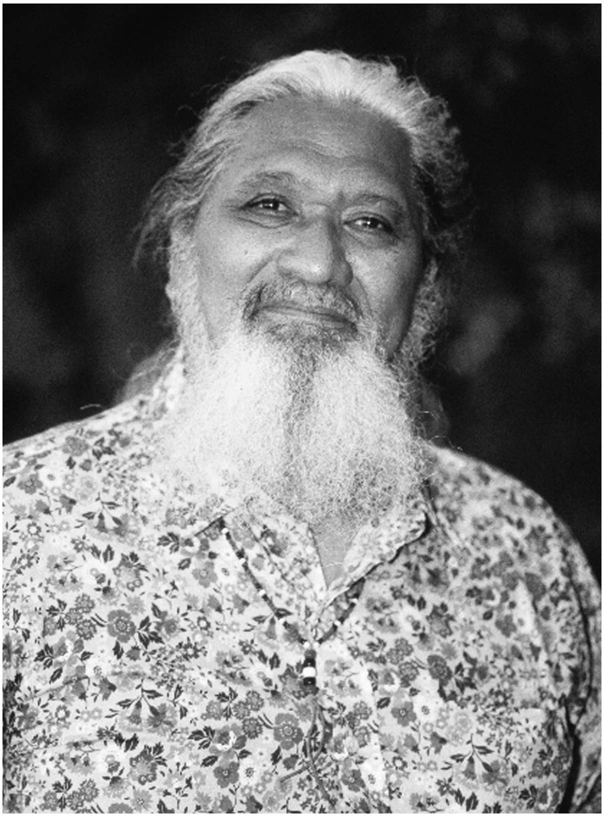
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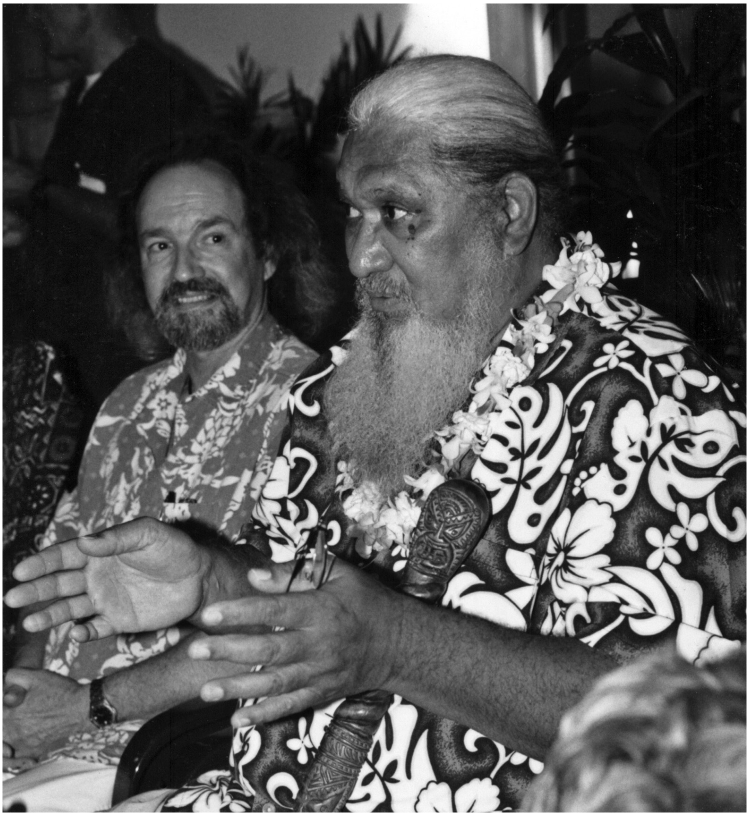
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This book is offered with my great affection, profound respect, and deep gratitude to Hale Kealohalani Makua, who entrusted me with his spiritual knowledge and who encouraged me to bring it to the wider world.

'E ola mau loa	Immortality to you
'E Makua 'e	Makua
'Eli 'eli kau mai	And may a profound reverence alight on you.





Hale Makua speaking at Volcano Village, Hawai'i, 2001



Hank Wesselman and Hale Makua talking at the Place of Refuge at Honaunau, South Kona, Hawai'i Island, 1999

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The Bowl of Light

At twilight, Makua got up, using his walking stick for stability, and lurched over to his truck to reach for something in the bed behind the cab. He returned to the table under the shelter with a large pu'olo, a ti-leaf bundle that was wrapped and tied in the traditional style. He presented it to Jill and me with a grin and the simple word *makana*—"gift."

We eyed the large, leafy bundle with anticipation for several long moments, savoring this time in the dying light of the last day of the year. Then we opened it excitedly and found within a beautiful yet simple wooden bowl made in the Hawaiian style and shaped like the lower half of a gourd.

"This is your bowl of light," intoned the kahuna with a warm smile, "the light that was a gift from your 'Aumakua, your immortal spiritual soul that divided itself before you were born. Each of us comes into the world from the great beyond with our seed of light. This light nourishes us and sustains us as we pass through life—but as we grow in experience and wisdom, things happen.

"Sometimes we lie. Sometimes we steal, and sometimes we injure others through our thoughts, our actions, or our words. When we step into the negative polarity, it is as though we put a stone in our bowl, and some of our light goes out. Slowly through time, our bowl of light fills up with stones, and our light dims until it is nearly gone."

Makua stopped and looked at us with great seriousness. "The great problem in the world today is that the whole show is being run to individuals whose bowls of light are filled with stones. With

few exceptions, there is no light shining forth from their bowls, despite what they may think and proclaim, and we can observe the truth by their actions."

Makua looked away, toward the crater, while we digested this statement. There was no question that the world was troubled, and this was due to the fact that the concentration of the world's wealth and power at the top ensured that roughly three billion people lived in stark poverty under abysmal conditions. After several long moments, he continued, "Hopefully, we wake up to what is going on and discover what we are doing." The elder paused dramatically, his expressive dark eyes luminous. "At that moment, we become aware that our bowl of light is almost filled with stones and that there is almost no light shining forth. And you know what do we do then?" Makua paused, and his gaze turned serious. Jill and I hung on every word.

Gently he took the wooden bowl from me and turned it over, shaking it vigorously. "We simply dump it out!" A huge roar of laughter burst forth from all of us effectively freeing us from our grim thoughts about the state of the world. "We start over then, but from that time forward, things are different. From then on, we begin to live our lives with awareness, braided with the cords of aloha. And it is then, precisely then, that we begin to walk our path as spiritual warriors."

THE THREE KAPUS OF THE SPIRITUAL WARRIOR

The Hawaiian elder looked us over slowly in the fading light of this long day as the winds subsided into silence. The air around us felt soft, and our mood reflected this, creating a sense of ease between us. I was aware as well that Makua had come to a decision about us.

"As spiritual warriors," he began, "the path that we walk on is narrow, and it is constrained by three kapus, three sacred directives. Since you have reached that place of knowing, I can offer these kapus to you.

"Love all that you see—with humility. In order to love all that we see, this can only come from a place of humility," continued the kahuna, with a grin. "I worked on that one for seven years.

"Live all that you feel—with reverence. When we live what we feel—what the mythologist Joseph Campbell meant when he said 'follow your bliss'—this leads us inexorably toward reverence, an active sense of respect. This is the foundation stone of indigenous mind." Makua paused as if to see if we understood.

"Know all that you possess—with discipline. And when we know all that we possess—and this includes what possesses us—we find our self-discipline. We cannot walk the sacred path without discipline. This is where so many spiritual seekers as well as teachers have stumbled."

Together we sat in silence as he completed the three kapus. In those moments, surrounded by flowering 'ohia trees and small 'ohelo bushes, with bright green ferns growing directly from the black, stony volcanic substrate in the dying light, I was aware that something quite rare had just occurred. I glanced at Jill and saw tears gathering in her eyes. Makua simply smiled as the quiet deepened and we digested his words. He then ran them by us once more, just to make sure we had it.

"When we come from the place of humility, we connect with the energy of compassion," he intoned gently. "This allows us to experience the power of aloha—of love.

"When we practice acceptance and live what we feel, we are drawn inexorably toward reverence, an active respect for everyone and everything we encounter in life.

"And through knowing what we possess, we find our discipline. And in order to discover *who* we are as well as *where* we are, self-discipline is essential, because without it, we cannot progress."

His words triggered a memory within me, something I had learned through my erstwhile descendant Nainoa. What I was remembering had happened in conversation with another individual of Nainoa's time, with a man named William, who is a shaman, or in his words a spiritwalker.

"To be a medicinemaker," William the shaman had said, "one must have strongly developed ethics, and one must have heart—a well-developed heart. We may acquire great power in life, but if we have poorly developed ethics and an underdeveloped heart, we cannot be a medicinemaker."

I felt light-headed, as though I needed to recover from the impact of all that Makua had shared with me on this afternoon, and as I admired the wooden bowl, as well as what it represented, I suddenly realized that I had no gift to give him in return.

On impulse, I reached for the string of bright tribal beads that I was wearing around my neck and offered them to him. I had received them from a Wakamba tribal man named Kaumbulu in Kenya more than twenty years before. He took them graciously and then studied the repetitive pattern revealed by the beads.

"For me," I began, "the red beads symbolize blood and thus the body, the physical aspect of ourselves. The blue ones represent the mind, and especially the higher aspects of the intellect, our inner chief."

"And the white beads," Makua broke in, "represent the spirit—the higher aspects of our selves, our 'Aumakua." He then graciously put them on.

I asked if we might take a photo or two to commemorate our meeting and he agreed, so I immediately hauled out the Nikon and the flash attachment. The first picture I took reveals the chief staring directly at me, wearing my beads, his formal demeanor conveying the approval he felt in our new connection. Jill then took one of the two of us in which Makua looks every inch the dedicated and serious chief. But when I took another shot of him and Jill, she said something that made him burst into laughter and he smiled in that photo.

As the long afternoon came to an end and the kahuna prepared to leave, Makua walked up to me and gently pressed his forehead and nose to my own, briefly looking straight into my soul as we shared the breath. Then he smiled, kissed me lightly on the cheek, and left with the words "love you."

He then gave the honi to Jill, and as the light faded, he turned and got into his truck. As Makua started the engine and backed up, he leaned out the window and called "*A hui hou,* until the next time."

Since that day, the kahuna's bowl has traveled with me; it holds a candle and thus the light in the center of the circles at my workshops and presentations. Whenever I feel the need, I put my face

into the bowl and breathe deeply, replenishing and restoring my supply of light. And periodically, when I have stepped temporarily into the negative polarity, I sit with the bowl in light meditation; then I turn it over and empty it out with focused attention.